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ABSTRACT

An approach to writing in a college-level English as a second language (ESL) course is based on recent emphasis in research on the processes involved and strategies used in the various areas of human endeavor. Recent research in writing has indicated that effective and unfrustrated writers carry out the writing task in ways that are very different from the linear process that most people learned in school. The student is encouraged to use the approach of successful writers by: breaking the task into subprocesses that can be handled independently, moving freely from one task to another, and using a variety of techniques to handle problems. Unit topics include: the writing process (monitoring and problem-solving), the relationship between writer and reader, brainstorming vs. idea analysis, working with deeper levels of meaning, misunderstandings, the drafting/feedback/revision cycle, researching the reader and the content, and surface error analysis. In the classroom, these emphases are then related to the overall objectives of enabling students to write clear, effective, and readable academic work by developing an awareness of their own writing processes, as well as those of effective writers. Students also become aware of the reading process and the relationship between reading and writing. (MSE)

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A Process Orientation in ESL Writing

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Introduction

In this paper I am going to discuss the way in which a process-oriented approach to ESL writing is implemented in a credit ESL course at Carleton University. I would like to note that this course is still being developed. Some parts or aspects are more fully developed than others, and certain problems will be noted and further changes suggested.

The main thrust of this paper is in two areas: 1) the implementation of a process-oriented approach to ESL writing, and 2) the development of a course through successive offerings. Thus we are talking about both the writing process, and the teaching process.

In the first part of the paper, I will discuss what it means to focus on the process rather than the product, and briefly summarize the conception of reading and writing evolving from recent research. In the second part of the paper I discuss how this orientation or focus translates into course objectives, and classroom activities.

For the teacher and the student, focus on the process of writing means focussing on the writer doing the work as it is

FL 015378

going on rather than on the work itself after it is over. The teaching of writing has traditionally focused on the product. The teacher or textbook gives explanations about what good writing is, about grammar, and organization, generally based on rules to follow. Then the students do exercises on particular points of grammar or rhetoric, and writing assignments on particular topics. The teacher looks over the students' written work, making comments and corrections. The students then look at the corrections of the mistakes that were made, perhaps carrying out some activity with these corrections, or simply throw the work in the garbage. A consequence of focussing on the product is an emphasis on the surface forms of the language, on the words chosen, on rules of language usage in isolation—often prescriptive rules reflected in comments such as "don't use a preposition at the end of a sentence," "use connecting words," "don't make sentences too long." These are rules which are to be applied independently of the meaning being expressed. Thus, a focus on the product is a focus much more on form and much less on meaning. To the extent that there is a focus on meaning, it is not meaning as it would be perceived by a particular reader in a particular context of communication, but rather meaning as the teacher perceives it in isolation.

Focussing on the process—or on the writer during the process of writing—concentrates on the problems or difficulties that the writer goes through and the blocks that writer arrives at. The emphasis is on solving problems in putting meaning across. Additionally, for the reasons noted below, there is a focus on the reader, an awareness of the reading process and what a reader goes through in trying to make sense of a text.

Current Conceptions of Reading and Writing

This process orientation in teaching ESL writing reflects a recent emphasis in research—an emphasis on the processes

involved and the strategies used in various areas of human endeavor. There is a large body of literature related to investigations of the processes of reading and writing and the relationship between them. In addition, there is important work done in the ways in which the results of these investigations have influenced pedagogy.

Recent research in the area of reading has pointed out the close link between the processes of reading and writing—an "interaction between writer and reader mediated through the text" (Widdowson 1979:174). The reader, in trying to understand a text, makes use of the knowledge of conventions of writing, a knowledge of how textual transmission works: "the reader understands that a text was composed through a series of deliberate choices on the writer's part, and the reader understands the conventions that governed these choices" (Olson, Duffy and Mack, 1980:69). There is an increasing awareness that a reader does not simply match a stored meaning to the words or groups of words that s/he reads, but rather that the activity creates a personal meaning through the words in terms of the background that s/he brings to the text.

Recent research into the writing process by a number of researchers has indicated that our conceptions about the way effective and unfrustrated writers carry out the task of writing is quite different from the conception that we traditionally learn in school.

Our traditional school-based conception of writing is that it takes place (or should take place) in three linear steps. The first step is to make a clear, straightforward outline of the major points and subpoints that we want to include. The second step, then, is the actual "writing" —putting these points into words, as accurately and correctly as possible. The third step, once this is done, is to make any necessary alterations or corrections to the surface level of the text. There is often a great resistance to "going back to do something over", which

is seen as a negative unnecessary chore. There are a number of assumptions about writing which are implied by this three-step procedure. First, it is assumed that when we write the outline we already know what we want to say, and that our ideas will not change as we write. (A common belief is that a *good* writer knows what s/he wants to say before beginning to write.) A further assumption is that the second step—putting the outlined ideas into words—is best conceived and carried out as a single, straightforward task. The subsequent outcome is expected to be a draft which needs little changing.

Recent research, corroborated by our experience with students, seems to indicate that it is precisely the attempt to follow this pattern which results in many of the problems and frustrations that writers have. We find that blocks and frustrations often seem to occur when a writer is trying to do many complex things at once. For example, the second step of the three-step procedure described above means working out the detailed ideas, organizing them, putting them into words, and finding exactly the right words and sentences to express these ideas all at the same time. We frequently find writers getting frustrated by ideas which shift and change as they are trying to write them down. Or writers who do not know where to begin and so cannot get started. Or writers who begin over and over, each time trying a different order for their ideas. If, at the same time as all this, the writer is trying to produce polished prose and memorable sentences, the chances of a breakdown increase greatly. And this attempt to produce polished prose brings with it another risk—if the writer, after a great deal of thought and effort produces the "perfect sentence," it becomes a great deal more difficult to throw it out if it no longer fits the overall picture. In other words, the words and sentences, rather than the ideas, begin to control the writing.

The way that the writing task is handled by experienced writers (as this is beginning to be revealed by investigations

into the writing process) is quite different from the way that we were taught to handle a writing task in school. First, these effective writers tend to break the process up into subprocesses, any of which can be handled independently rather than several simultaneously. Second, these effective writers tend to go back and forth frequently from one subprocess to another. They feel free to return to a previous activity and redo it based on new information or changes in ideas. Following these two procedures—breaking the process into subprocesses and going back and forth between them—turns out to be quite different from trying to do several things at once, and from following a linear progression through the stages. Third, these effective writers tend to have many strategies or techniques to try to deal with problems that they run into. They tend to take a problem-solving approach to the question of writing and have a variety of strategies to try.

In addition to the research into the processes of reading and writing, there has also been major work done in the area of teaching writing, work which has emphasized many of the above-mentioned aspects of the writing process. (See Graves 1983, Flower 1981, Elbow 1973, Young *et al.* 1970.)

The Process of Course Development

In this section, I will discuss the ways in which the theoretical notion of process orientation can affect the practical matters of course development and day-to-day teaching. Note that this is not an application from theory to practice: practical matters inform and alter specific theoretical points as much as theory informs and alters practice, and, as will become clear in the following discussion, there is no one to one correspondence between theoretical principles and classroom activities.

An intervening connecting layer between the theoretical stance of process orientation and the actual classroom activities which are carried out in practice is the setting of various

levels of objectives. At the "highest" level are the target objectives—what we are hoping to achieve by giving (and from the students' point of view, by taking) the course in the first place. Such objectives are not behavioural—i.e. they do not describe behaviours expected of the students at the end of the course. Rather they can be considered "target" in the sense of capabilities we are aiming toward. To get to these end-points, we can follow a number of different possible routes. These possible routes can be mapped out via a number of levels of enabling objectives. (This process of linking target objectives and learning/teaching objectives is treated in detail in Woods, mimeo.)

Since a process approach is one unfamiliar to most students, the intiative for setting the "higher" level objectives comes from the teachers; an attempt is made to allow students' input to filter up through the activities as they are progressing, and back through retrospective discussions about the course.

The target objectives for the course I am describing in this paper are based on very general characteristics of students taking the course. The students are ones whose first language is not English, ones who are enrolled in regular university courses, and ones who have problems doing the writing required in these courses, problems related to the quality of the work they hand in as well as to the difficult and lengthy process they go through to produce this work. The target objectives for these students are:

1) to become productive, unfrustrated writers,
2) to produce clear, effective and readable written academic work.

Using these target objectives as a starting point, I proposed to the students a set of enabling objectives which could provide a possible route to be followed. In setting out these enabling objectives, I tried to make explicit a number of my assumptions, related to but not necessarily a part of the pro-

cess orientation. These assumptions are, in a sense, part of my "personal theory" of learning/teaching writing. First, an awareness of the process of reading (what a reader goes through while reading and of those things which make reading difficult), of his/her own process of writing, and of the processes of writing followed by effective unfrustrated writers will help students develop their ability to write. Second, the most effective means to develop this awareness is primarily through experience, and only secondarily through explicit indication. In other words, a writer will learn more quickly and thoroughly by experiencing the reading process, by experiencing his/her own writing process in detail, and by experiencing the process that a 'good' writer goes through, rather than simply being given information about these processes.

From these factors—target objectives and the above assumptions—come a set of enabling objectives:

A) developing awareness of

i) one's own process of writing,

ii) effective writers' processes,

iii) the process of reading;

B) trying out and developing new strategies to make the writing process easier and more effective.

From this relatively "high level" set of enabling objectives come a more "immediate" set of enabling objectives, ones which describe in more detail the means by which we can move towards these "higher level" enabling objectives; these are manifested in terms of the units of the course (described below). The actual classroom activities which are intended to lead toward the various levels of objectives are integrated into the course design, and many recur at various points during the course. Many of the activities focus on what the writer is doing or could do at different stages of the writing process, and on trying out and "experiencing" alternative strategies.

This multi-layered view of the course, from target objectives to classroom activities, is illustrated in Appendix A.

The Design and Organization of the Course

The best way for me to indicate the way in which the activities relate to the objectives is to describe the design and organization of the course. In describing the course organization, I will also describe the activities which make up the course.

I should mention at this point that the organization, choice of classroom activities and choice of writing strategies are not fixed in terms of inclusion or sequencing. The course is still developing, and I am experimenting with different ordering of the units, and I am emphasizing different strategies as I learn more from the students about how they can be presented and absorbed. It is not at all clear yet that any one sequencing of units is best, although it may become clear at a later point. The theme which unifies the various units is: "The Writing Process"; in a sense, it is a course *about* writing, in which many academic skills (research, reading articles, developing your thinking, listening, talking and especially writing) are needed. The skill of writing has a special status—the overall course provides a legitimate academic context into which writing practice can fall.

The units of the course form the basis of the remaining discussion.

Outline of Course Units

Unit 1: *The Writing Process*
- A. Monitoring the writing process
- B. Problem-solving strategies

Unit 2: *The Relationship Between Writer and Reader*

Unit 3: *The "Right Brain-Left Brain" Metaphor in Writing:* Brainstorming vs Idea analysis

Unit 4: *Working with Deeper Levels of Meaning*
Introduction to tree diagramming

Unit 5: *Misunderstandings*

Unit 6: *The Drafting/Feedback/Revision Cycle*

A. Drafting tricks
B. Finding out what a reader is going through
C. Revising

Unit 7: *Research*

A. Researching the reader
B. Researching content

Unit 8: *Dealing With the Surface Level of Writing*
Surface error analysis

As I discuss each unit I will refer to the objectives, and associated sub-objectives in order to illustrate how the activities and objectives are related.

Unit 1: *The Writing Process*

This introductory unit is divided into two parts: A) Monitoring the writing process, and B) Problem-solving strategies. This unit is primarily related to two main objectives mentioned above: i) developing an awareness of one's own process and of the fact that specific aspects of the process can be manipulated or altered by using conscious strategies, and ii) developing an awareness of strategies used by experienced effective writers. These objectives are main focus points for the overall course.

A. Monitoring the writing process

For many people (both natives and second language users), writing is a hit-or-miss operation. You sit down and write: that's all there is to it on a conscious level. Students rarely think about and consciously consider specific procedural things you can try to make the process of writing easier, and the product better. These "things" are quite different from what they have typically been told in school, usually prescriptive things such as don't split infinitives, don't end a sentence in a preposition, don't repeat the same word too frequently. This kind of advice has nothing to do with procedural thinking,

and does not encourage writers to find and remove "bugs" in their own writing process. A lack of affinity/ability for "procedural thinking" means that when a writer runs into a dead-end or a block, there are few, if any, alternatives for escape.

In the early part of the course it became quite clear that most students were not used to thinking about their own procedures: I asked students (as part of a longer information-gathering) in the form of a questionaire and in class discussions how they proceed when they write. For most of them, there was no answer to this question other than "I make an outline, I write, I correct." Both monitoring and debugging are unfamiliar processes to most students.

Since this unfamiliar notion is one which needs to be developed through the entire course, the activities of the initial unit are really just an introduction. The activities described below are some of the possibilities designed to introduce the notion of monitoring procedures.

Activity 1A.1: "Finding a Topic"

The students are given an assignment (during class and as homework) to "think of a topic to write a 2-3 page essay on." Completing the assignment is simply choosing the topic. But they are instructed to "keep notes" on what they think about while trying to work out a topic, and to answer the following questions.

1. What is the first idea you had for a topic?
2. Did this change (either a complete change, or a small shift of focus)?
3. If so, what to? Make a list of all the changes in ideas you went through.
4. Did you finally come up with a satisfactory idea?
5. If so, what is it?
6. When and where did you think of it? What were you doing when it occurred to you? What were you thinking about when it occurred to you?

Activity 1A.2: "Process Log"

The students are instructed to write the essay, either on their topic (above), or on the topic of "The Year 2000: What Will the Planet Be Like?"

They are instructed to write on one half of a vertically divided page.

On the other half, they are told to write comments about what they are doing, about what time it is, about any blocks or confusion, about what they are thinking, about anything they cross out, about beginning again, about what they are thinking about when they are blocked, about when they take a mental break.

Activity 1A.3: "Culture Shock"

The students are given the topic "Culture Shock: People's Experiences upon Entering a New Cultural Environment" (for example, Western culture, the culture of Canada, the culture of English-Ontario, the culture of Academia, etc.). They are told to make a "procedural plan"—how they plan to get the information and produce the paper. Various plans are displayed on the board. An information-getting procedure is assigned—interviewing classmates and friends. The students are instructed to keep a log of everything that they go through in preparing the paper. When the assignment is due, students hand in the paper, and a summary of their process along with the procedural plan and log.

B. Problem-solving strategies

This part of the unit explicitly introduces a "model" of how good writers go through the process of writing: a) breaking the overall process into smaller subprocesses and b) having a repetoire of strategies for each subprocess.

Although I do not believe that it is necessary for students to learn about writing in order to improve their ability to write, I wanted the students to learn to reflect upon and discuss their own experiences while dealing with the "problems" of writing. In addition, this explicit focus is related to their stated expectations as learners: they expect to be given some explicit instruction about writing. A further reason is that it provides a framework for me to give them feedback about their writing—I can focus on a particular aspect of their writing while letting them know that other aspects will be dealt with at another time: particularly I want to avoid being persuaded to discuss sentence level work when that level is not at issue. The final reason is that the information presented is such an eye-opener, and a relief (things like "don't worry about grammar in the draft stage"), that they are both fascinated by this information and relieved at hearing it.

The model of "what an unfrustrated writer does" is summarized in Appendix B: a breakdown of the overall writing process into subprocesses, and a repertoire of categories for each.

Unit 2: *The Relationship Between Writer and Reader*

Another area crucially related to the process of writing, one which most students are unaware of, is the process of reading. They are, first, unaware of the close (although perhaps distanced in time and space) relationship between the writer and the reader, and second, unaware of the kinds of difficulties a reader may have in trying to make sense of a text.

The activity outlined below, by causing a reading breakdown, tries to develop the students' awareness of the process of reading, particularly of what it is like to be a confused reader. This activity tries to make it clear that a writer when writing a passage may have a "picture" (or background knowledge, or context, or set of assumptions) in her head; however, if a reader does not share this background, or if it is not made explicit by the writer, the reader may be left very confused. This activity is related to the major objective of taking the reader, and the reading process, into account in writing.

Activity 2.1: "Balloons"

The class receives copies of the passage below. They are instructed to read the passage, and while reading, to note in the margin any comments they have, any words, phrases or sentences that they do not understand.

> *If the balloons popped, the sound wouldn't be able to carry since everything would be too far away from the correct floor. A closed window would also prevent the sound from carrying, since most buildings tend to be well insulated. Since the whole operation depends on a steady flow of electricity, a break in the middle of the wire would also cause problems. Of course, the fellow could shout, but the human voice is not loud enough to carry that far. An additional problem is that a string could break on the instrument.*

Then there could be no accompaniment to the message. It is clear that the best situation would involve less distance. Then there would be fewer potential problems. With face to face contact, the least number of things could go wrong. (Bransford and Johnson, 1973:719)

After they have finished, individuals are asked to turn the article over and to summarize the main idea. When they have difficulty doing this, we discuss as a group the problems they had in understanding the article. Then they are given the picture below, which provides a context for the article. Using the context provided, they try again to summarize the article.

(adapted from Bransford and Johnson, 1973:718)

This activity also has two purposes related to preparing students for activities to come later in the course. It serves as an introduction to the notion of explicit versus implicit information, a crucial notion in several subsequent activities. It also introduces them to the activity of making their lack of understanding clear, which is important later when they are learning to give feedback on each other's writing (see Unit

6B).

In addition to this activity, a number of articles about the relationship between reading and writing are assigned, particularly Bransford and Johnson (1973), which shows the importance of context on comprehension, and Steffenssen *et al.* (1973) which shows the effects of cultural background on comprehension. These are aimed at revealing the kind of assumptions a writer might take for granted on the part of a reader, and thus leave implicit.

Unit 3: *The "Right Brain-Left Brain" Metaphor in Writing:* Brainstorming vs Idea analysis

By means of a metaphor (the right brain-left brain dichotomy) which has been popularized a great deal recently with regards to different kinds of learning (for example, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* and *Writing the Natural Way*), this unit attempts to illustrate different kinds of strategies which can be used for getting, developing and redeveloping ideas to serve as input to a writing task.

Although there is a danger that the metaphor might be interpreted literally by students, drawing the dichotomy is a useful way to illustrate out-of-the-ordinary alternatives to dealing with the "idea stage" of the writing process. In this case, the dichotomy is treated as a teaching tool and not an attempt to categorize mental processes.

The simple dichotomy is drawn with some of the terms popularly associated with each extreme (see Appendix C-1). The following strategies, related to one or the other extreme, are tried out during classroom activities.

Two strategies which encourage the "free spirit", the uninterfered with (but unguided) movement through a series of associations, are 1. freewriting (as described in Elbow 1973)[1],

[1] One use of freewriting which occurs throughout the course is that of students freewriting their spontaneous reactions to activities tried or experiences had during different lessons: as well as giving students practice in freewriting, this activity provides the teacher with feedback about how the students are perceiving different aspects of the course.

and 2. clustering (as described in Rico 1983). The main characteristic of freewriting is that the writing is non-stop, non-reflective. It has no logical beginning nor end: it begins with three dots (...) and ends with three dots (...). Correction, rethinking, and conscious working out are discouraged, and free flow of thoughts is encouraged. Clustering is described by Rico (1983) as: "a non-linear brainstorming process akin to free association ... that allows patterns to emerge ... It is the writing tool that accepts wondering, not-knowing, seeming chaos, gradually mapping an interior landscape as ideas begin to emerge ... Clustering acknowledges that it's okay to start writing not knowing exactly where, who, when and how. Most writers acknowledge that this is how it inevitably is anyway" (1983:28–29). Figure 3.1 below illustrates a "cluster" (adapted from Rico 1983:126).

Figure 3.1: "Cluster"

In contrast, a technique encouraging an "analytical idea search" is adapted from Flower (1981). This kind of idea search focuses on logically developing specific ideas or aspects of the topic. It can be carried out through the use of a tree diagram, and specific kinds of questions. Figure 3.2, below, illustrates the technique (adapted from Flower 1981:100).

Figure 3.2: "Tree Diagram"

A further aspect of this unit involves relating this dichotomy to the reasons for which a reader reads a text, and what this implies about the way a writer structures the text. A distinction is made between, on the one hand, reading for

enjoyment, for the purpose of entering into the experience related by the writer without close attention to the information value of the text, and, on the other hand, reading for information, for a precise understanding of the information being conveyed. Appendix C-2, which represents different types of writing, including different types of academic writing, illustrates this distinction (or more accurately, this continuum).

Unit 4: *Working Out the Deeper Layers of Meaning*

The notion of deeper layers of meaning is a notion which is difficult to get across to many student writers. It is difficult for them to realize that the reader may not share the implicit connections, the emphases and the hierarchy of meanings unconsciously assumed by the reader. Because of their previous school writing experiences, students have often come to the conclusion that faulty grammar is the chief cause of lack of understanding, and they generally consider that an outline takes care of the organization. The necessity for "deeper" level planning is not obvious, and they are therefore unfamiliar with how to deal with this kind of planning.

The technique used to develop the ability to do deeper level planning is that of the "tree diagram" mentioned above. There are a number of crucial differences between "working through a tree" and "making an outline". One important difference is that an outline is generally conceptualized as final. However, as most writers know, ideas usually develop further when written down, often leaving a gap between the plan and the written version. A tree, on the other hand, is to be conceived as dynamic: it develops, it is tentative, it is returned to in order to be altered. Furthermore, a tree can be used to decomplexify complex sub-areas: a separate sub-tree can be developed for a particular sub-area. In other words, an outline is typically used to represent the organization of ideas, whereas a tree is used to develop them.

Even more important is the following difference. An out-

line may illustrate several different levels of meaning, but it leaves implicit the connections between levels. As noted above, it is often the implicit connections, assumed by the writer but not by the reader, which leave a reader unable to grasp what is going on. A tree diagram, on the other hand, by virtue of the connecting lines, emphasizes the connections. By labelling the connecting line with the logical connection we can draw this underlying level of meaning to the surface. Figure 3.2 (above) illustrates how a tree diagram can make explicit the logical relationship of a subordinate idea to its superordinate.

The following activities are intended to allow the students to experience organizing deeper levels of meaning, to experience the strategy of nutshelling (summarizing "in a nutshell" what you are trying to say, thus making explicit the superordinate ideas), and to experience the difference between chronological organization and hierarchical or logical organization.

Activity 4.1: "E.T."

The teacher reads aloud the "Ant's Eye" description of the beginning of the movie *E.T.* (below), in a suspenseful voice. the students then, 1) freewrite for two minutes on what they thought while it was being read, and 2) write a summary of as much of the plot as was read.

Then the teacher reads aloud the "Eagle's Eye" description (below). Again the students 1) freewrite their reaction, and 2) write a summary of the plot.

Finally the differences of the two methods of presentation are discussed, in terms of the reader's understanding and impression of the text, and in terms of the writer's purpose in producing the text (using the dichotomy illustrated in Appendix C-2).

Ant's Eye Description

It's dark . . . There are rustling noises in the woods . . . in a clearing, a huge spaceship . . . Underneath, in the bushes are some strange creatures. One creature strays far away from the spaceship. Suddenly, the creatures start running towards the spaceship, running from men with flashlights, who have appeared out of nowhere. But the one who is far away can't reach the spaceship . . . it hides in the bushes. The creatures in the ship wait . . . But they can wait no longer. The men are approaching. The leader at the spacecraft sends out one last call . . . but there is no answer.

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The ship takes off, the men watching it in amazement. The creature is left behind.

The men go home. The creature is lost, lonely, afraid and hungry. He starts wandering around until he comes to the edge of somebody's backyard ... Here he sits, hiding in the long grass. A door opens and out comes a young boy. He senses that there is something in the grass ... He starts to investigate and the creature starts to run. The boy and the creature both run and suddenly they run into each other. The boy, scared out of his wits, runs shrieking into the house. The creature hides in a tool shed in the backyard. Nobody believes the boy's story. Night after night he sits outside and waits for the creature to come back. He has to prove to his family and friends that he's not lying or crazy. And finally one night his chance comes ... (and so on).

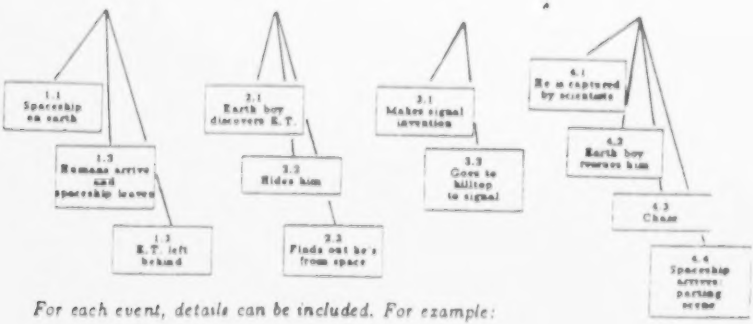
Eagle's Eye Description

The story is about:

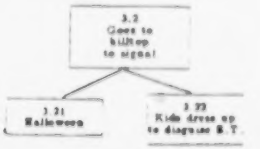
E.T. — a creature from outer space who gets stranded on earth. He makes friends with a small boy, who helps him to return to his own planet.

There are four main parts to the movie:

In each part, there are several main events:


1.1 Spaceship on earth
1.3 Humans arrive and spaceship leaves
1.3 E.T. left behind
2.1 Earth boy discovers E.T.
2.3 Hides him
2.3 Finds out he's from space
3.1 Makes signal invention
3.3 Goes to hilltop to signal
4.1 He is captured by scientists
4.3 Earth boy rescues him
4.3 Chase
4.4 Spaceship arrives: parting scene

For each event, details can be included. For example:



Activity 4.2: "Nutshelling a Movie"

Each student has previously chosen in class a television show or movie from the T.V. or movie guide which the other students have not seen. In particular, they are encouraged to watch a show which has multiple plots unfolding simultaneously. In class, they have to carry out the following tasks: i) organize the plots of the movie into a tree representation ii) nutshell orally (in five minutes) the plot for a classmate, and iii) write a summary of the plot which was described.

The tendency of many students is to present information in an academic paper as a "personal chronology," i.e. in a manner similar to the "ant's eye description." The purpose of the above activities are 1) to give them an awareness of the two ways of presenting information, both legitimate in different contexts, and 2) to give them the experience of trying to efficiently transmit information to a listener using a hierarchical method of organizing and presenting that information.

Unit 5: *Misunderstandings*

A major focus of the course is to sensitize the students to the cause of potential misunderstandings—to have the students become aware of where and how misunderstandings can happen, and ultimately be able to predict when their own writing could be misunderstood.

The original input for this unit is brought into play earlier in the course, through activities intended to sensitize the students to misunderstandings they can experience while reading (see Activity 2.1).

Activity 5.1: "Misunderstandings Project"

Students have been given the assignment to "collect" instances of misunderstandings or potential misunderstandings which occur over a period of several weeks, recording them on a *Misunderstandings Logsheet* (see Appendix D). The teacher primes the students by i) illustrating a number of misunderstandings (ones from his own collection, and ones which occur in class), and ii) illustrating the ways to tell when a misunderstanding may be occurring (for example, when two interlocutors are

showing signs of confusion or frustration), and iii) by explicitly providing feedback on the students' written work on ambiguous and difficult-to-interpret wordings.

The culmination of the activity is an assigned research report entitled "Misunderstandings: Causes and Consequences." From the instances of misunderstanding which the students have noted, they are to try to determine what the factors are which cause misunderstandings to happen and what are the possible communicative consequences, and to apply this work to strategies to avoid causing misunderstandings in writing.

One important objective of this unit on misunderstandings is to sensitize the students to how easily another person can misunderstand the idea you are trying to put across. This sensitization is meant to flow into the next section where the importance of reader feedback and of revision is discussed.

Unit 6: *The Drafting/Feedback/Revision Cycle*

A. Strategies for drafting

There are a number of strategies which can make the process of drafting—putting ideas into words—easier and less frustrating. These strategies involve i) avoiding inhibition, ii) deciding what to draft when, and iii) using time.

There are a number of suggestions provided to the students to help them avoid inhibiting their drafting. Using the freewriting technique mentioned above is one suggestion. Frequently, an inhibiting factor is stopping to worry about the correctness or appropriateness of a particular word. In order to keep the drafting flowing, students are advised, if they cannot think of the right word, to put a blank, to put a word in their own language, or to put an approximate word, to put a big asterisk in the margin of choices they feel unsatisfactory, and to write "Rough Draft" at the top of each page, so that no one will judge it as final.

To help the students break down the drafting into manageable chunks, students are advised, if their paper is long and complicated, not to try to draft it from beginning to end,

as they are likely to run into conceptual and organizational problems. They are advised instead to draft small sections separately, on separate sheets, starting with whichever small section they feel most comfortable with.

One strategy to help them to get a section drafted, and also to give them an expectation of how long drafting takes is suggested: choosing a small section and setting a limited time in order to complete it.

B. Getting reader feedback

For many students, the necessity of getting reader feedback is not always obvious, and the ability to give appropriate feedback is not always present. Previous activities, such as *"Balloons"* and the *"Misunderstandings Project"* have attempted to sensitize the students to how easily a misunderstanding can occur. In addition, comments provided by the teacher on the students' written work[2] are an initial attempt to sensitize students to ambiguities in their own work, as well as to ways of providing useful comments about others' work, particularly comments about the way something has been understood.

Beyond these on-going feedback activities are several possible techniques for giving students the chance to experience, face-to-face, reactions to their work. One technique, outlined by Elbow (1973) involves student writers giving each other feedback on work that they have done. Because this technique involves peer criticism, it must be handled very carefully. There must have developed a sense of "team spirit" and trust among the group. The students must have been coached to give feedback in non-judgemental terms: i.e. the focus of the feedback must be on the listener's reaction rather than

[2] The teacher provides the students with two types of feedback on their written work: indications of instances of surface level problems (see Unit 7, below), and comments about possible interpretations of what they have written. These latter comments are included to sensitize the students to possible unintended interpretations of the words they have used.

on the writer's paper. Although this distinction may sound subtle, it can be profoundly important in practice, allowing the writer the unusual experience of being very attentively and openly listened to, rather than being superficially judged and criticized.

Activity 6B.1: "Peer Feedback"

Alternative 1: Each student reads twice aloud, slowly and carefully, a passage s/he has written (freewritten or written from a cluster).

Alternative 2: A student circulates copies of a passage s/he has written to all students, who read it twice, slowly and carefully.

While listening or reading, the students note reactions and thoughts which evolved. After the reading is finished, the students discuss the thoughts and reactions they had during the reading (Elbow terms this "giving movies of your mind").

Activity 6B.2: "Pair Feedback"

Alternative 1: The students are grouped in pairs with their work. One student reads the other student's work aloud. The writer, listening to the other reading his/her work, listens for pauses, wrong intonation, and watches for facial reactions, signs or puzzlement.

Alternative 2: The writer reads own piece aloud; the partner has to summarize it for him/her.

A major goal of the reader feedback activity is to sensitize the students to the importance of feedback from a good reader. A secondary goal is to help them become good readers themselves. Eventually they may become good readers of their own writing, ones who can read their work with their reader in mind, and thus be able to determine themselves what kinds of things need to be revised.

C. Revision

An attempt is made via the reader feedback activities to orient the students' expectations to the amount of revising that may be necessary, depending on the purpose, the reader, the conventionality of the format, and the complexity of the content. In general, it is more than they expect.

An attempt is also made to sensitize the students to the

view that revision is a powerful tool for developing ideas, rather than a quick check at the end of the process. The activity illustrated below (taken from Elbow 1973:19–20) is intended to demonstrate how ideas can develop during revision.

Activity 6C.1: "Elbowian Three Draft Technique"

Using a topic like "what is the hardest thing about being a student in Canada or at university," students freewrite a draft in fifteen minutes. They then rest for five minutes, and then read over their work and note any central emerging issues or concerns. They then repeat the whole cycle twice more, editing their last revision for a one page essay.

Variation 1: In between drafts, or in between drafts 2 and 3 only, students read aloud what they have written, to get feedback and interpretations from other students and the teacher.

Variation 2: In between drafts, or between drafts 2 and 3 only, students work in pairs, each reading the other's aloud and providing spontaneous reactions.

For revision, there are also a number of techniques which can make the process easier. For example, drafting on different sheets for each section allows you to change the order of the ideas quickly, and to try out different orders. Also, using scissors and scotch tape can help you move ideas around, and insert and remove ideas in specific locations. (A computer/word processor can provide the same function, although is lacks the spatial advantage of spreading pages out on a table.)

Probably the most important advice we can give to students relates to attitude: an openness to possible changes. If a reader says that they do not understand something you have written, it pays off to believe them rather than to argue.

Unit 7: *The Surface Level of Writing*

This unit focusses on the surface level of writing—in particular producing grammatical sentences. This kind of work is particularly relevant for second language writers who have

grammatical problems, but is also for second language writers who have problems more commonly associated with first language writing. The four broad categories of surface level problems which have become evident are: i) grammatical problems (morphology, subject/verb agreement, prepositions, etc.), ii) "strange" sentences (ones which look or sound non-native like), iii) an ultra complex style ("bureaucratese"), and iv) a "talky" style (rambling, colloquial). The surface level work relates to all of these: the thrust of the work is trying to locate the factors in the writing which contribute to the inappropriateness.

Input to this unit has been provided throughout the course (although explicit attention to surface level concerns has been avoided during activities related to developing ideas and drafting). On previous work done by the students, the teacher has indicated occurrences of words or phrases contributing to the four categories of problems noted above. Students have been keeping a log of these occurrences and of possible appropriate reformulations (see Appendix E).

Activity 7.1: Locating Surface Level Problems

Using previous written work upon which the teacher has provided indications of surface level problems, students work in pairs to categorise these problems to determine which types occur most frequently. From this, they each produce a priority list of types of problems occurring in their work. Then, using their priority list of problems as a guide, they edit (examine for surface level problems) work which has not been examined by the teacher.

Activity 7.2: Report on Analysis of Surface Errors

Based on their log of surface level problems, and on the outcome of Activity 7.1, the students prepare a research report (6–8 pages, including sections on investigation procedures, results with examples, and suggestions for avoiding future errors, as well as an appendix of errors) on the results of their investigation.

Unit 8: *Research*

A. Researching the reader

It rarely occurs to students, when they are considering the idea of research, that it is possible and beneficial to research the reader—in terms of expectations, norms, cultural conventions, attitudes. In particular this is important in academic circles: the reader (a professor) may never have explicitly stated many of his/her expectations, and yet deviation from these expectations may lead to a failing grade.

This idea of researching the reader is broached initially in the context of this course: by this point the students have received a great deal of feedback and comments about what I consider to be important. The students, in groups, carry out the following activity, in order to learn to determine a professor's biases with regard to written work. The point is made that what I have told them about "good writing" may not be shared by other professors in other fields.

Activity 8A.1: "Expectations of a Reader"

Based on comments I have made in class, and on the feedback I have given them on their written work, students prepare a list of the characteristics of written work, prepare a list of the characteristics of written work which they think that I think are important.

Following this activity, a number of strategies are discussed for determining what another professor might think important, for example;

- listening to professor's words in class
- looking at professor's corrections
- looking at good students' papers
- looking at published papers in the field.

Some of the possible relevant considerations are also discussed, for example:

- style of writing
  - use of passive
  - use of I, we
- format
  - footnotes
  - references
  - sectioning

- organization of information

Activity 8A.2: "Conventions of a Field"

For this course and another course they are taking, students prepare a list of what they think the professor would consider the characteristics of a good assignment/good written work.

Go to the library to find some articles from that field. Determine the conventions used for:

- footnotes
- references
- sectioning
- organization of information/rhetorical structure.

Each student chooses a field to examine, and compares results with another field.

B. Researching the content

The work on researching content includes several subparts: i) finding references, ii) finding useful information, iii) avoiding plagiarism. Having students report in class on how they located references in the library and elsewhere, and sharing their strategies for collecting information and taking notes, are activities intended to promote the ability to locate relevant information.

One very important aspect to include as an integral part of the teaching is that of plagiarism: we often treat it as an unforgiveable sin rather than a cultural difference, one which could become part of the teaching. To ESL students, not confident about their own abilities in English, the look and "sound" of a printed text is very sophisticated. It is more than a matter of "being tempted" to use the author's words however. It is a matter of learning conscious strategies to avoid this tendency, and of learning how to be discriminating: i.e. to know when it is appropriate to use the author's words and how to refer to the author. In the initial stage of research, when looking through resource material, students often copy down the exact words (the reasons students have given are: because the words look so good, because is is very hard to find alternative wordings at the spur of the moment, because you

do not know initially what will become a quote, and because copying the exact words is a good way to learn sophisticated English). At the next stage, when the writer is using the notes, the words become less directly linked to the original author, and eventually, they get copied into the final text. To a teacher, these "plagiarized" phrases often stand out in a text a student has written. A strategy for avoiding this tendency involves changing students' procedures for taking notes from written sources, using much more point form and own wordings (using symbols to indicate where to return to for useful quotations).

It is also possible to give students conscious strategies for avoiding this tendency, and at the same time have them develop more confidence in using their own words. One suggestion is to have them read a passage, page or section, and then close the book before writing down their own summary of what was said. (Sometimes students are surprised to find that their own words can also be good.) The following class activity is intended to further help students to develop this ability to avoid using authors' words.

Activity 8B.1: "Referring and Quoting but Not Plagiarizing"

Students bring an article of their choice to class, and their task is to produce a summary of it, one which will arouse the interest of another classmate, using quotations, references, footnotes, but avoiding exact wordings otherwise.

First read it (or a single section). Then turn it over. Then write the ideas from memory, using nutshelling and planning points in a tree. Then go back to the article to check. Look for appropriate quotes.

The major project outlined below is intended to integrate the various aspects of the writing process and the various strategies into a single term-long project. An attempt is made to provide detailed feedback at different stages of the overall process.

Activity 8B.2: Major Project: Final Paper and Process Report

The students choose a topic of interest to write a major paper on; this can be a paper that they are doing for another course. While working on this major paper, they keep track of the process they go through while deciding on the topic, while doing the research, and while trying to get the paper written, including the various stages they went through, the problems or blocks they had, and the strategies they used or tried.

Course Development: The Next Steps

At this point in the development of the course, the important question is not "is this the best approach?" but rather "how can the course be made more effective in terms of the course objectives?"

The kinds of feedback which can serve as input for considering this latter question are related to the two target objectives—one related to the process of writing (becoming an unfrustrated, effective writer), and one related to the product (producing clear, effective written work).

Feedback about the development of students' ability to handle the writing tasks comes from the process notes and freewritten reactions done as a part of many course activities. From these, it is possible to get some idea of the insights and discoveries, as well as the frustrations and difficulties, that the students experience as the course progresses. Feedback about the improvement in the work that the students produce comes from a comparison (in terms of a number of criteria: clarity of focus, organizational clarity, sentence clarity, format, surface errors, overall impression) of passages, essays and reports produced early in the course with those produced towards the end. From this comparison, it is possible to get an idea of the specific areas in which the students' work has or has not improved.

Among the different aspects of the writing process, some were immediately seized upon by the students and the associated strategies easily integrated. Others were strongly resisted, and the students found the associated strategies difficult to learn.

One aspect, which, although new to most of the students, seemed to be very easy to grasp and to integrate, was the notion of using conscious strategies for getting ideas: including clustering, freewriting, idea searching. In fact, many students began to adopt these strategies for papers and exams in other courses. Not all students accepted all of the strategies—some rejected outright one strategy as being quite useless while accepting and freely using another. Occasionally seemingly subtle differences were crucial. One student found tree diagrams confining and counterproductive until she stopped using boxes to bound each node; suddenly trees became very useful. Another student found both tree diagrams and clusters quite meaningless until he discovered that you can cluster later in the process for particular sub-nodes of the tree; only then, with some clear direction to the clustering, did it become useful.

The aspect of the writing process which seemed to be the most difficult for students to integrate was i) exploring deeper layers of meaning (both accepting that you might not know yet yourself what you really want to mean, and trying to find it out), ii) linking these deeper layers to the surface level of words and sentences, and iii) realizing when the links are not clear, and that the reader is getting a different message from what you intend.

Within this overall area, however, certain activities worked well. The *"Balloons"* activity, for example, seems to give most students a profound jolt, and has subsequently become a point of reference for dealing with interpretation problems. But further activities should be developed to give the students the need and desire to play with their "raw" ideas, to allow them to develop, and to enjoy giving and getting feedback about them.

Another aspect of the writing process which students seemed to find difficult (as evidenced both by their process notes and by the final drafts they handed in) was the detailed

work on surface errors. The students were very enthused about being advised of their surface errors by the teacher, and sometimes surprised to discover that they could correct those errors themselves, but they often lost interest before they became adept in doing their own editing. I have not yet succeeded in giving them the need or the desire to discover, examine and play with the surface level of their work. Nevertheless, an occasional spark of surface level sensitivity during some of the activities makes me think that there may be ways to provide the support and excitment that would be needed to achieve this.

From the students' point of view, the most frequently verbalized benefit to the course was the attention they received on writing problems that no one had ever discussed with them before: the problems they had *while* writing. From my point of view, the most exciting part of focussing on the process of writing was the corresponding focus on the process of teaching. Many of the activities, because they encourage the learner to verbalize what s/he is going through, inherently produce feedback about the learning and hence about the course. The kinds of process notes which the students keep, and the kinds of in-class discussions which result provide constant feedback about the successes and difficulties that the students are having. While the students are getting feedback related to different aspects of the writing process, I am getting feedback related to different aspects of the learning/teaching process.

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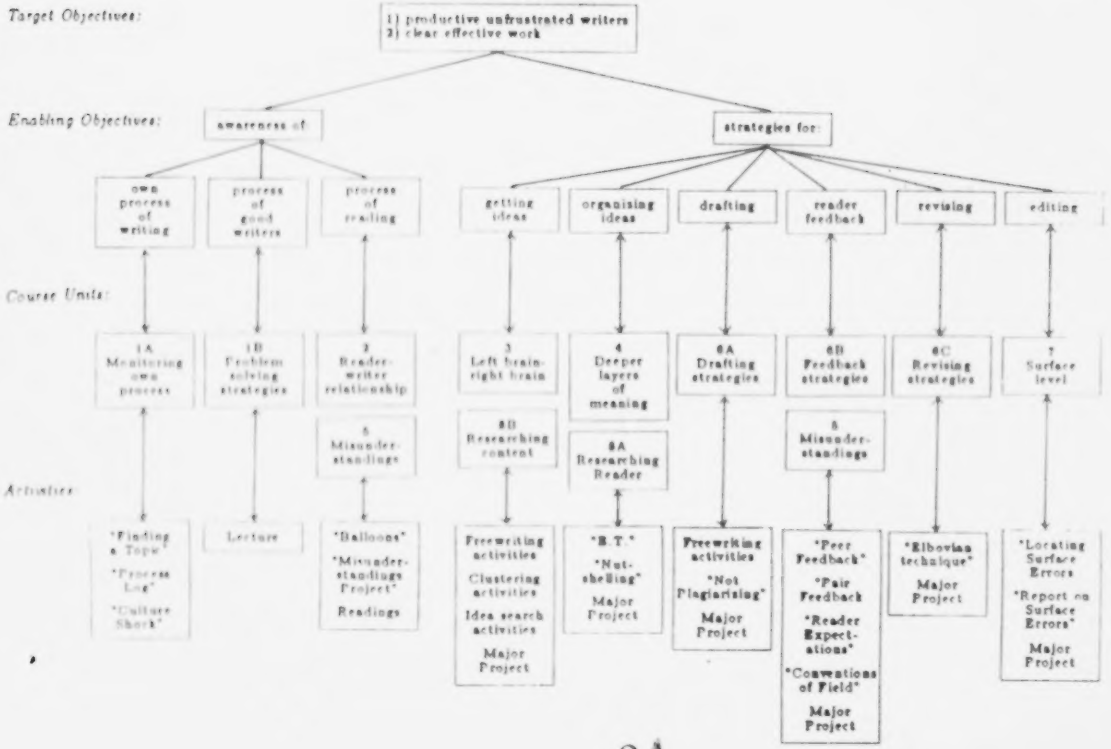

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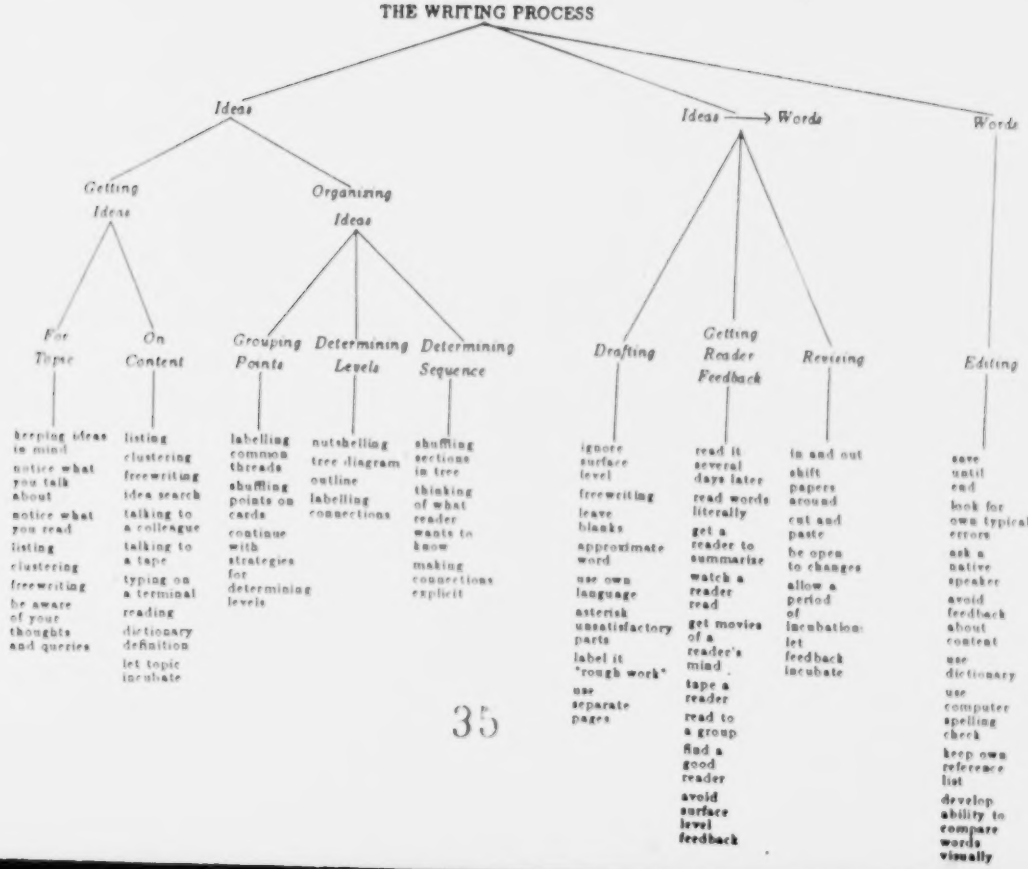
APPENDIX B

Strategies for Subprocesses



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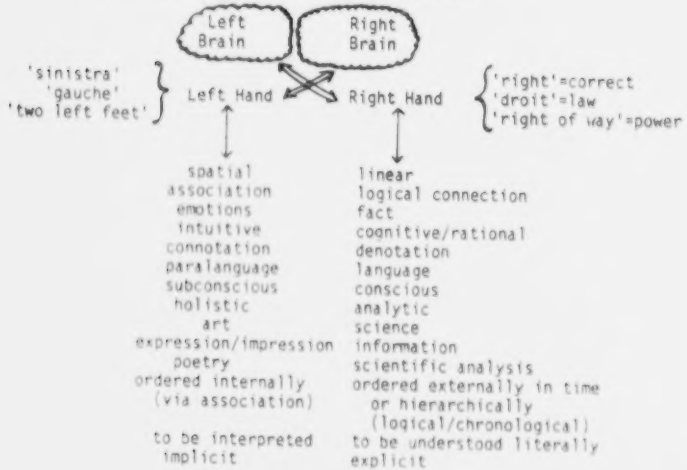
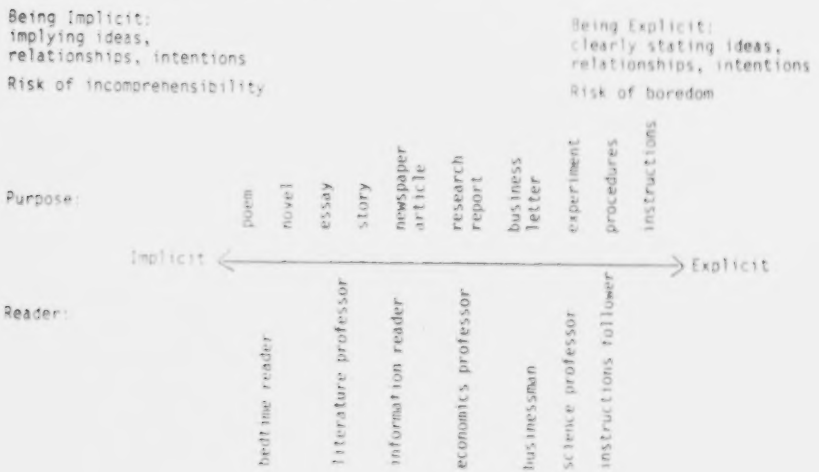
APPENDIX C-1

The Left Brain-Right Brain Metaphor



APPENDIX C-2

Implicit-Explicit Information



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APPENDIX D

Logsheet of Misunderstandings

LOGSHEET OF INTERACTIONS
WITH POTENTIAL FOR
COMMUNICATIVE MISUNDERSTANDINGS

What first person said (oral or written)	Comments about interpretation	What second person said	Comments about interpretation
1. me why ? why are you standing here ? I mean why did you change lanes ?	(a fellow that I know, we stay I saw him change lanes on the eighteen) (I said the word 'why' in a relatively louder voice)	him pause I beg your pardon pause to get some food Ah ! I'm sorry. Because food is available here	(probably he didn't hear me) (he thought I asked why he was in the eighteen)
2. Paul See you later ! what's going Ah no I just meant I'll see you again sometime in the future	(we were leaving postage)	Me when ? Till me, when do you want to see me today ?	(I thought he wanted to see me later that day) (I thought he didn't hear me, so I repeated)
3. Me (looking at a Big Mac box) Wow ! a hundred per cent beef ! No That is a good example of a potential misunderstanding !	(in a McDonald's restaurant)	Any friend Does it say the hamburger is all 100% beef ? Maybe it means that there is other 100% beef on mercury other planets on the hamburger	

(examples taken from students' work)

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SURFACE ERROR LOGSHEET

Name: _____

First Language: _____

My version	Possible reformulation	Reason for difference
in Friday	on Friday	"in" is not correct for day
dexbook	textbook	spelling: missing "t"
I was seldom talk	I seldom talked	past tense, not passive - don't use "was"
If the culture shock of newcomers is , he will	If the culture shock of newcomers is , they will	pronoun must be plural because it refers to a plural word
my vocabularies are weak	my vocabulary is week	vocabulary is not a countable noun
Cultural shock	culture shock	inappropriate expression
it is hardly to determine	it is hard to determine	need an adjective after "is", "ly" is adverb
he contacts with different tradition in foreign country	he comes into contact with a different tradition in a foreign country	inappropriate expression article missing article missing
I didn't realized	I didn't realize	verb tense agreement
My father is an engineer and he hopes that at least one of his sons will choose it as a career	My father is an engineer and he hopes that at least one of his sons will choose engineering as a career	"it" does not refer to any previous word in the sentence

(examples taken from students' work)

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